

Opening Statement
Technology and Innovation Ranking Member Phil Gingrey (R-GA)
February 27, 2008

Markup of

- **HR 3916**, *An Act to provide for the next generation of border and maritime security technologies*
- **HR 4847**, *The U.S. Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2008*
- **HR 5161**, *Green Transportation Infrastructure Research and Technology Transfer Act*

As the lead Republican sponsor of this legislation, I would like to commend my colleague, Mr. Mitchell from Arizona, for bringing forward this legislation to reauthorize the U.S. Fire Administration. I am very pleased that we have worked in a bipartisan manner over these past few months to prepare the bill we have before us today.

Mr. Chairman, I am also pleased that this bill is also gone through the regular order process. In October, the Technology and Innovation Subcommittee held a hearing on the reauthorization of USFA, and just three weeks ago, H.R. 4847 was unanimously reported back to the Full Committee from the Technology and Innovation Subcommittee.

The mission of USFA is to “reduce life and economic losses due to fire and related emergencies, through leadership, advocacy, coordination and support.” This organization provides vital assistance in the areas of training, fire education and awareness, and awards grants to a number of local fire departments across the country. These activities have made a substantial impact over the last 30 years.

Mr. Chairman, it is important to note that because of the work of the USFA, smoke alarms are now standard issue in residences across the country; over a million firefighters have received advanced training; and firefighter equipment and safety continually improves.

USFA should be proud of its record of achievement. However, it’s also clear that improvements can still be made. In the last ten years, deaths related to fires have decreased by approximately 25%, from nearly 5,000 in 1996 to 3,675 in 2006. Although that decrease in fire-related deaths is commendable, the United States still has one of the highest death rates from fire in the industrialized world.

Additionally Mr. Chairman, despite decreases in the numbers of fires, direct damage costs are increasing and have surpassed \$10 billion per year. Put another way, in an average year, fires cause as much damage in the United States as hurricanes. The reauthorization of USFA will allow the agency to continue to improve our preparedness and reduce our vulnerability to fire.

Unfortunately Mr. Chairman, last year we saw wildfires that ravaged Southern California and the need to develop a more cohesive way of combating these fires. I am happy to see that this legislation specifically addresses the issue of fighting fires in an urban-wildland interface by implementing methods to better respond and prepare for fires that move from wildlands to suburban and urban areas.

The current bill is an important and well-crafted step forward for USFA. I urge all of my colleagues on the Committee to support the bill. With that Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.